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Letter dated 28 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a statement issued on 25 August 2000 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea in response to Ethiopia's allegations against Eritrea on "violation of human rights" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 116 (a) and (d), and of the Security Council.

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Annex to the letter dated 28 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ethiopia's wild allegations underlie a sinister motive

In the past two weeks, the Ethiopian regime has been making wild allegations against Eritrea for purported "violation of human rights". The smear campaign has been accompanied with thinly veiled threats of military action.

For background information and in order to put matters in perspective, we shall cite excerpts from international News Agency reports. In this regard, an AFP story of October 22, 1999 under the title: "**Eritrean Deportees to be Forced Across Mined Area**" reads:

- "Ethiopia put about 13000 Eritreans on 29 buses, which officials now claim, are now headed through the most hazardous route, where there is a red alert and a build-up of troops by both sides".
- ICRC spokesman for Africa, Juan Martinez, said from the ICRC headquarters in Geneva: "The ICRC was not in favour of transporting people because there was no guaranteed safe passage. We approached the Ethiopian authorities and said we did not agree with the trip and asked them to reconsider. We are really concerned. They have decided to do this against our will. It is a **violation of the Geneva Conventions and it is not acceptable**".

Another AFP report of July 21, 2000 titled "**Ethiopia blocks return of its nationals from Eritrea reads:**

- "More than 1,000 Ethiopians have been blocked at the last minute by their government from returning home from Eritrea, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Friday. The ICRC said that Addis Abeba had on Thursday asked it to change the itinerary of the returning 1,100 Ethiopians";
- "Everything was in order. The people were already there in a bus when the Ethiopian authorities gave a red light, citing security reasons" told AFP ICRC's director in Eritrea, Jean Paul Jacquot, adding that a group of Eritreans had made the same journey in reverse route on Tuesday. "Are they perhaps trying to slow down the process, with 2,600 people being ready to leave?" he wondered.

What these reports establish clearly are the following:

1. Ethiopia flagrantly violated ICRC rules and norms in the inhuman deportation of over 75,000 ethnic Eritreans that it has and continues to perpetrate. Indeed, the ICRC was never allowed to visit or escort the deportees. Moreover, in most cases, the ICRC, and through it the Eritrean Government, were never informed in advance of the number of deportees and the border posts at which they would be dumped. The Government of Eritrea was usually informed of the probable location by the ICRC at the last minute, making logistical preparations for receiving them extremely difficult. Often the Ethiopian regime would dump one batch (usually in excess of 2,000) of ethnic Eritreans in Omhager (western part of Eritrea) and dump the next batch in Burrie (eastern Eritrea) with no purpose other than causing maximum logistical difficulties to the Government of Eritrea and undue pain to the deportees. This has caused the death of several people, particularly among those deported along Burrie, due to sunstroke.
2. The repatriation of Ethiopians from Eritrea that begun recently and which was prompted by massive internal dislocation brought about by Ethiopia's invasion of sovereign Eritrean territory was initiated with the active involvement and support of the ICRC. It was interrupted because Ethiopia refused to cooperate invoking false excuses. Eritrea in fact requested from the beginning that the ICRC arrange transport for, and escort across the border, the Ethiopians who want to go back home voluntarily or those who may have to go back because they do not possess the necessary legal permits for continued stay in the country. This remains it current position. But as illustrated in the AFP story, ICRC's involvement was blocked and interrupted because Ethiopia refused to cooperate and the ICRC could not take part unless there was an explicit agreement by both parties. Ethiopia's allegations of "deportation without ICRC involvement" are thus vicious distortions of the real facts.

Moreover, we must recall that it is Ethiopia, which has and continues to officially sanction the deportation of ethnic Eritreans. (Remember the Prime Minister's gloating that "his government has the right to expel anyone whose colour of his eyes it did not like"). It is Ethiopia which continues to incarcerate, for more than two years now, thousands of Eritreans in the Dedesa concentration camp simply because they are of "military age". Partial reports that have reached the Government of Eritrea indicate that 12 of them died under torture in 1998 alone.

Since the signing of the cessation of hostilities in Algiers on June 18th, Ethiopia has not only continued to deport ethnic Eritreans from Ethiopia, but it has deported 15,000 Eritreans from their own sovereign land; from the lower Gash Barka area. And it continues to perpetrate gross crimes on those remaining in the occupied areas, including by preventing access to humanitarian agencies to monitor the situation and to provide them with the necessary assistance.

All the while Eritrea has not taken retaliatory acts that could have been justified under the circumstances. The first acts of the Eritrean Parliament in response to Ethiopia's policy of ethnic cleansing was to adopt a bill aimed at protecting the human rights of Ethiopians living in the country. Ethiopia has thus no moral right or justifiable cause to accuse Eritrea of "foul play".

So why this vicious campaign now? The reasons, which are multifaceted, consist of:

1. its unwillingness to receive its own nationals;
2. its desire to create a sense of tension and delay the deployment of the peacekeeping mission;
3. its desire to create a pretext for resorting to war at an opportune moment.

The behaviour of the Ethiopian regime in the proximity talks; its insistence in Algiers on signing a partial agreement in stark contradiction to its position for the past two years on a comprehensive package ('nothing is agreed until everything is agreed"); and, its aversion to a UN peacekeeping force are indeed tangible indicators that betray its real motives

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asmara
25 August 2000